A Guide To Audience Response Systems

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Using audience response systems in the workplace

Everyone knows that offices are hives of technology. Computers, printers, scanners, phone systems, conference screens... there are a lot of gadgets and gizmos to be found in the majority of offices, which is good as it shows a forward-thinking company which isn't afraid to engage with new things to improve the way it works. So, what might you be able to use an [audience response system](#) for in your office?

Firstly, if you hold any training days, these can be a great way to track progress. Hand each member of the training day a handheld remote and at various checkpoints throughout the day, ask a series of questions to help them consolidate the knowledge from the previous section. For example, ask them 'what would you do if' scenarios for health and safety training, or ask about a series of facts you introduced to check that they have been engaging with the material throughout the session.

Another way they can be used is in meetings or conferences when you might need to take a vote on an important issue to determine the way the office is run or similar. This means that certain individuals can't dominate the meeting by speaking over everyone, and anyone who would otherwise be too intimidated to speak up is given an equal opportunity to voice their opinion in the form of an anonymous vote. The results show up on screen immediately so there can be no dispute about the way people have voted.

Audience response systems are also used for risk assessment, so you can supply them to your health and safety team so they can perform a faster, more accurate assessment of any risks facing the office. This data can then quickly and easily be collated into a report as the results appear automatically in graphic form so it creates a visual way to display how the team have voted.

Of course, you can also use it for fun reasons too. The office Christmas party needs a quiz, so why not make it gameshow-style by supplying 'contestants' with a handheld voting system. You can opt to show individual responses or anonymous responses from the group as a whole, so this system works very well for a festive office version of 'Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?'

Audience response systems can be used for a range of purposes in the office, and it may well be the case that this novelty item will inspire lots of other uses in the office, so get creative and see what your team come up with.

Why are audience response systems so useful?

Crowd psychology can be a strong influencing factor in many public votes, including those at business meetings. How many times have you been in a crowd to whom a question has been asked, considered voting one way but changed your mind when you noticed that the majority of people voted differently and joining them? If you are participating in a vote, you're far more likely to vote the way you genuinely feel if you're given the chance to vote anonymously.

Audience response systems have been proven to increase attentiveness. In studies conducted in universities, it was found that attention increased when students were given a [handheld remote](#) with which to respond to questions in their lectures and seminars. If people know that they will be tested on their knowledge, they are more likely to concentrate to avoid being caught out later in the session.

The ability to see the responses immediately is also extremely useful, especially for those conducting research or looking for answers in a test situation. It is far easier to collate a series of results using an automatic electronic system than to count each vote manually, process them all and draw conclusions from these results. Instead, the results appear immediately on a screen in graph format, allowing the entire meeting to be able to interpret the results straight away.

Another plus point is that individual responses can be tracked if desired. You can generally choose whether you want voting to remain anonymous or whether you, as the person who set up the poll, gets access to each person's results. This can be a good way to keep track of overall opinions when collecting feedback, or for tracking training progress. If some people consistently give incorrect answers, this gives you evidence to see where they might be going wrong so you can help them.

Furthermore, the interaction element of an audience response system increases knowledge retention. If we participate in a learning activity rather than simply listening to or watching someone else, we are stimulating more of our brains and creating more connections, meaning that we are more likely to remember what we are being taught. This has the added bonus of feedback straight away, so we are able to confirm or question our knowledge of a topic. This means that any confusion can be addressed at the time.

Audience response systems have many positive features, and are a good option for anyone wanting to see an improvement in engagement, performance, feedback quality and enjoyment in their business meetings. Your staff will appreciate the fact their opinions are being heard, and the feedback you receive will be much more productive.

Why audience response systems are better than smartphone voting

If you're thinking about holding a vote at your next conference, it can be tempting to do it using a smartphone-based voting system. However, it's better not to get into this trap, as often it can cause more problems than is necessary, holding up the voting process and leading to inaccurate results.

There are a couple of ways of doing this. Firstly, the vote can take place on the phone's web browser. While most phones these days come with web access, it can be temperamental. It varies widely from network to network, and it isn't always possible to maintain a reliable web connection on a mobile, and Wi-Fi and GPS connections often fail and need to be restarted – not ideal when trying to collect votes immediately. The other way is to use an app, which can be costly to develop and make work on each different operating system.

Secondly, not everyone has a smartphone. While sales of iPhones, BlackBerry and Android phones are on the up, some people prefer to use an older model, meaning they wouldn't be able to participate in the vote. This isn't ideal when one of the great things about a [voting system](#) is to increase involvement and engagement. Supplying everyone with their own handheld voting remote at the start of the session, however, means that everyone is able to participate.

Furthermore, the time taken to vote can differ greatly between an audience response voting system and a mobile. While on a phone, the user will need to wake the phone up, enter their security code, enter the URL or find the app and wait for it to load before selecting their answer, it is simply a case of a single button press on a voting remote.

Another plus of an audience response system is that the audience won't be distracted by their mobile through the rest of the conference. If they're encouraged to keep their phone at the ready for voting, it's likely they'll find themselves distracted by emails, social networking and texts, so won't be paying attention to your presentation. In addition to this, there will be no problems of drained battery power, as the response systems can stay on charge while not in use so that they always have enough battery power to last through a meeting, meaning that voting can take place smoothly and efficiently.

Overall, while it can be tempting to cut corners and attempt to develop a universal voting system based on smartphone technology, it is far easier and more reliable to use a handheld audience response system to collect the results you need.